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ABSTRACT

This monograph provides an inservice workshop approach that school systems can use to address the needs of students who experience divorce. Questions addressed include: (1) What can school systems do to help students cope with their parents' divorce? (2) What can educators do to create a learning environment that is congenial for children who live with one parent? and (3) What resources are available to help teachers meet the needs of children of divorce? Chapter 1 presents research findings and lists recommendations on what can be done in schools to help children of divorce. Chapter 2 discusses effects of divorce at various developmental stages. Chapter 3, which provides the workshop outline, covers consciousness-raising for teachers, parent-teacher conferences, guidelines concerning the single parent for teachers, and legal issues relating to separation and divorce that are relevant to the school. Chapter 3 includes a survey questionnaire for single parents on school programs and policies, parent/school communication, and attitudes of school personnel. Chapter 4 delineates the teacher's role and describes group activities for elementary and secondary school students. An annotated bibliography provides over 75 citations and lists films and videotapes. A resource guide lists over 35 books for students. (RH)

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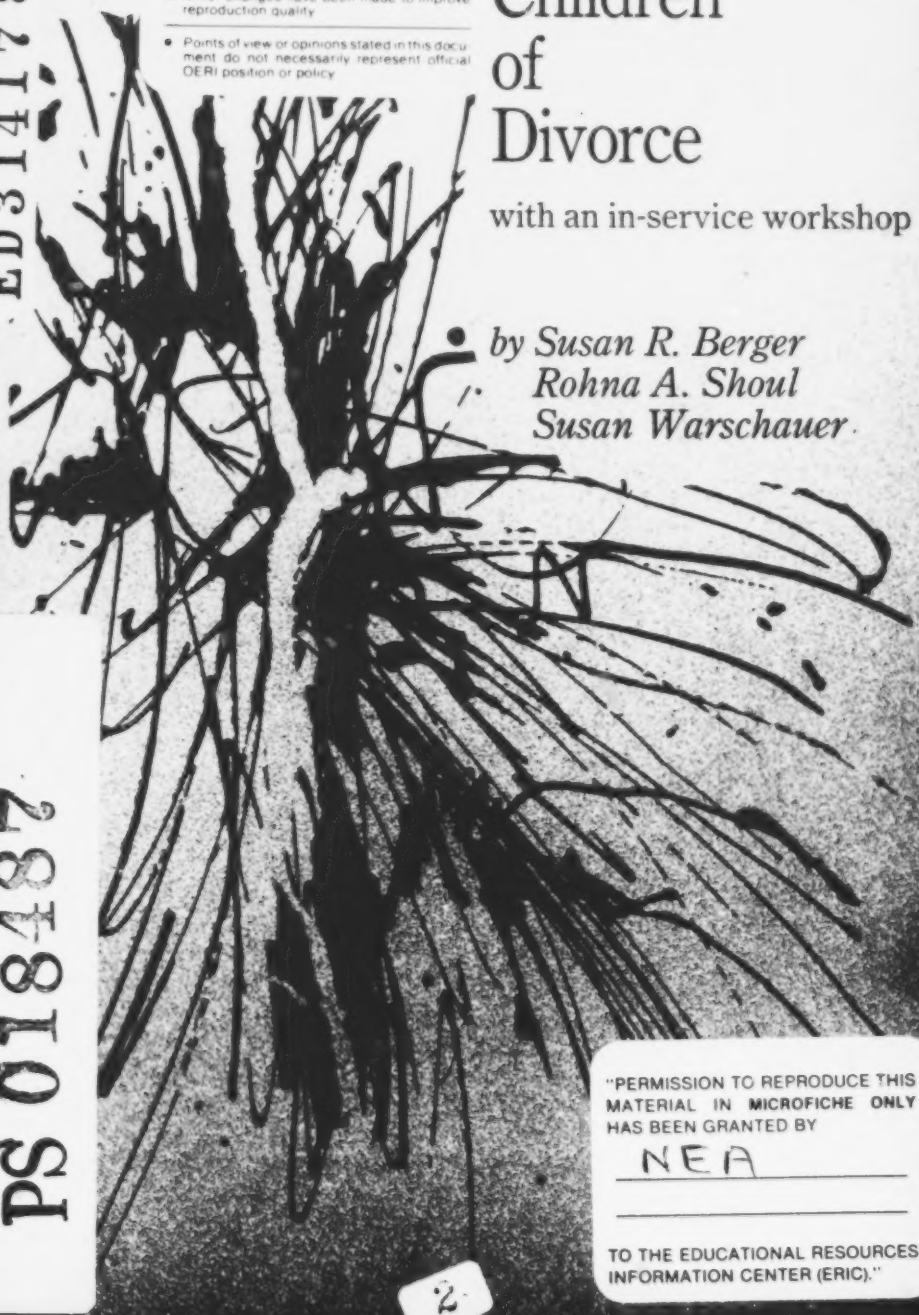
Children of Divorce

with an in-service workshop

by Susan R. Berger
Rohna A. Shoul
Susan Warschauer



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AUTHORS' PREFACE

Each day all over the United States children arrive at school with their books, completed homework, snacks, and whatever emotional baggage encumbers them. More than 1.5 million children under age 18 are affected each year by family breakups (18),* and nearly half the children born in 1980 will live in single-parent families at some point before they reach 18 (25).

Although their primary mission is to educate, schools must deal with the implications of this situation. Unless students are psychologically available while attending school, the learning process will be severely impaired. This availability is affected by the amount of emotional turmoil children are experiencing and by the stability of the adults on whom they depend (29, 30).

Opinions regarding the role of the school in dealing with family issues may vary, but the very presence of children in classrooms ensures that some role will evolve. Classroom behavior that interferes with learning cannot be ignored if teaching is to take place (36). Very often the school is the one stable factor in the lives of children experiencing family instability, particularly those at the elementary level (58). We therefore feel that the school has a responsibility to address both the educational and the emotional needs of children, taking into account that divorce is a process not an event.

This monograph provides an approach that school systems can use to address the needs of students who experience divorce. It focuses on their educational growth and classroom behavior from a developmental, life-cycle perspective The material can be used by individual schools and classroom teachers. It addresses the following questions:

1. What can school systems do to help students cope with their parents' divorce?
2. What can educators do to create a learning environment that is congenial for children who live with one parent?
3. What resources are available to help teachers meet the needs of children of divorce?

*Numbers in parentheses appearing in the text refer to the Annotated Bibliography beginning on page 38.

1. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CHANGING FAMILY DEMOGRAPHICS

In 1960, approximately four-fifths of the children in the United States lived with both biological parents; less than one-tenth lived with one parent (11). By 1985, the proportion of children living with both biological parents had dropped to approximately three-fifths, while that of children living with one parent had climbed sharply to nearly one-fourth (66, 67). In 1987, the Census Bureau reported that over half the babies born that year would spend part of their childhood in one-parent families (48, 49).

Divorce is the principal reason for the large increase in one-parent families. Every year divorce disrupts the lives of over a million youths (43). Between 1965 and 1985, the divorce rate in this country doubled. Although it recently stabilized, and there is some reason to expect it to drop slightly in the future, the United States will likely remain the nation with the highest divorce rate in the world (48).

A natural consequence of the nation's high divorce rate is a significant increase in the number of parents remarrying and forming stepfamilies. In 1960, only 9 percent of the children in this country lived in stepfamilies (11). By 1985, the proportion had increased to about 12 percent (50, 66).

These profound social changes challenge educators to address the needs of students from families that no longer fit the Norman Rockwell image. In her latest research (68), Judith Wallerstein becomes convinced that it is damaging to provide children with a model of adult behavior that avoids problem solving and that stresses martyrdom, violence, or apathy. A divorce undertaken thoughtfully and realistically can teach children how to confront serious life problems with compassion, wisdom, and appropriate action.

THE EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR

The majority of research studies indicate that, for children, divorce and one-parent homes mean a higher risk of problems in school (26, 29, 69). For example, a three-year study of 18,000 students from 14 states conducted by the National Association of Elementary School Principals

(NAESP) and the Kettering Foundation's Institute for the Development of Educational Activities (I/D/E/A) concluded that—

> As a group, one-parent children show lower achievement and present more discipline problems than do their two-parent peers in both elementary and high school. They are also absent more often, late to school more often and may show more health problems as well. (42)

The research most frequently cited in the educational literature about the effects of divorce on children is that of Judith Wallerstein and Joan Kelly (71), who conducted the California Children of Divorce Project. The first five years of this study were reported in 1980 (71). A ten-year report of the same children by Wallerstein and Blakeslee has recently been published (69). This investigation, involving 131 children from 60 California families, found that one-third of the children experienced learning problems and two-thirds showed noticeable changes in school behavior. These newly published results are not encouraging. They document the negative effects of divorce on a vulnerable population of young adults for whom their parents' divorce "was the single most important cause of enduring pain and anomie in their lives."

The factors that affect the extent to which children of divorced parents and single-parent homes are at risk include income, sex, and age. The majority of studies relating the absence of a father to school performance fail to attribute any significance to race. Income is the most critical factor. The median income of one-parent homes is less than a third that of two-parent homes. The lower a family's income, the more vulnerable the student. In fact, a number of investigators report that, following divorce, the vulnerability of children to problems in school could be at least as closely related to their families' loss of income as to the absence of their fathers (33, 54, 57). The absent parent can be the mother, although that is less typical.

The primary significance of income became even more apparent after further analysis of the data gathered for the NAESP-I/D/E/A study cited earlier (42). This analysis also showed that academic achievement of higher-income girls from one-parent families surpassed that of higher-income boys from two-parent families (75). Moreover, a number of other studies found that boys of divorced parents and single-parent homes are at greater risk than are girls in similar circumstances (29, 33).

Divorce also puts younger students at greater risk scholastically. Most couples divorce when their children are between the ages of 5 and 12 (19). Wallerstein and Kelly found that, at the elementary level, half the children of divorced parents experienced almost a year of learning disruption (70). If children in the primary grades are too distracted to develop basic learning skills, they will have achievement problems through-

out their school years (11).

Children whose parents are going through a divorce are also under stress. In the classroom, this stress can show up in the form of daydreaming, forgetfulness, nervousness, weariness, sadness, moodiness, dependence, declining grades, acting out, or physical complaints (3, 12, 18, 20, 52, 61, 71). As Wallerstein explains:

> Many of these children, especially the 5 to 8 year olds, are very worried about whether there will be anybody at home when they arrive. If you are sitting in class and the teacher is talking, and you are wondering if there is going to be anybody at home, it is impossible, even if you pay attention, to retain what you hear. (70)

On the other hand, students can respond positively to divorce. For example, the Children of Divorce Project discovered that some children reacted to the disruption in their homes by working harder at their studies and becoming more involved in extracurricular activities (71).

HELPING STUDENTS COPE WITH THEIR PARENTS' DIVORCE

The role of teachers in the lives of students whose parents have recently divorced is a sensitive one; in fact, it places them in somewhat of a dilemma. While teachers should be attuned to the possible appearance of stress symptoms, they should not make the mistake of assuming they will see them (1, 71). To do so would be to increase the burden on these students by making them victims of stereotyping. Studies of teacher expectations of children of divorce reveal that teachers made unfounded negative assumptions about these children (6, 55).

There are many ways schools can support students who are coping with divorce. Wallerstein emphasizes that school becomes more important to children whose families are in transition because it offers them structure, stability, and continuity during a time when their homes are being disrupted (70). In *Growing Up Divorced*, Linda Bird Francke, former *Newsweek* editor and divorced mother of three school-age children, discusses the pivotal role of the school. In a major chapter of her book, "Divorce and the School: The Second Family," she calls teachers "the unsung heroes of divorce" (21).

Francke, Wallerstein, Kelly, and others acknowledge the potential importance of the elementary school teacher to young children who are hurt by their parents' divorces (2, 18, 21, 61, 71). Because elementary students spend nearly one-third of their waking hours with a single teacher, this adult can show anxious children that a vital part of their world is still safe and predictable.

A number of authors of both contemporary books and journal articles offer specific recommendations about what can be done in schools to help children of divorce (1, 2, 3, 5, 10, 18, 24, 31, 51, 54, 61). These authors are in substantial agreement that teachers should—

- Know their own feelings about separation and divorce.
- Be alert for personality and behavior changes in their students and whether they are eating and sleeping properly.
- Seek support and information from colleagues and parents.
- Give students the opportunity to express their feelings. Empathy, rather than advice, is an appropriate response.
- Contact a parent, guidance counselor, psychologist, social worker, or school administrator if a student seems to be seriously upset.
- Make an effort to be informed about a student's visitation schedule and custodial arrangements. When teachers are informed, permission slips and other important communications are more likely to reach the right parent(s) at the right time.
- Hold conferences and meetings at times that are convenient for all parents, and provide for the noncustodial parent to receive information.
- Make an effort to know the surnames of the adults in a student's home. This will facilitate communications about school matters with parents, stepparents, legal guardians, or other adults in the household with an interest in the student's school activities.
- Understand the legal implications of a student's custodial status and be aware of who has the right to pick up the student from school.
- Be careful about language, avoiding pejoratives like "broken home." When having students construct gifts for Father's Day, for example, teachers might suggest making something for a male family member or friend who means a lot to them; they should also be prepared for students who will need to make more than one gift. Also, hold "parent activities" not "father/mother activities."
- Provide classroom experiences that will help all students understand divorce and realize that a family need not have two parents (see pp. 34–35 for classroom curriculum).
- Set up at least one in-service workshop each year to discuss problems of separation and loss in families.
- Encourage students to become involved in school activities.
- Be flexible, but not indulgent. In planning classroom schedules, teachers should understand that children of divorced parents are likely to be anxious on Fridays and disappointed on Mondays. Visits with absent parents can make it difficult to complete assignments,

but it is important to have the reassurance of consistent academic expectations.

- *Do not presume anything. A separation or divorce may improve the homelife for some students. It may also be very traumatic and the emotional fallout may not be observable until years later. Moreover, the effects may be quite different on children within the same family.*

Encouraging students to read both fictional and nonfictional books about divorce is highly recommended (2, 5, 7, 8, 17, 18, 24, 38, 61, 73). (Also see the Resource Guide.) In counseling and guidance literature, this is often referred to as bibliotherapy. Many juvenile fiction books about divorce are very engaging and would be appropriate for the teacher to read aloud to an entire elementary class.

Occasionally, children's television specials include programs that portray children coming to terms with divorce. Some educators suggest that teachers assign as homework the viewing of carefully selected TV programs (51, 72).

School counseling and guidance departments can also offer a range of programs to help children cope with divorce. These include structured groups and peer counseling for students and programs for parents. Structured groups meet for a fixed number of sessions, each with a specific focus or activity (4, 8, 12, 13, 32, 74). Peer counseling occurs in an open-ended support group that is facilitated by a counselor—for example, the Divorced Kids Group in Lexington, Massachusetts (24) and Youth of One Natural Parent in Quarryville, Pennsylvania (27). Parent groups are usually informational, focusing on what can be done to help children adjust to the changes in their homes and families (12).

Staff Development

Divorce education for teachers is another important recommendation (12, 18, 20, 21, 32); this is happening in states and school districts across the country. For example, the Oklahoma Education Association (OEA) has conducted teacher workshops on divorce for school districts, local associations, and a number of individual schools throughout that state. These workshops cover the effects of divorce at various developmental levels and strategies for improving communication with divorced parents. OEA also has developed a workshop for parents in which parent-teacher organizations and other adult groups have participated (62). Teachers in Marin County, California, have the opportunity to attend workshops conducted by psychologists form the Center for the Family in Transition, which grew out of the California Children of Divorce Project (21).

In Newton, Massachusetts, a group of teachers, counselors, and social workers formed the Ad Hoc Committee on Separation and Divorce, which provides workshops for elementary and junior high school teachers. The committee also has developed a package of materials for teachers that includes articles on the emotional and psychological impacts of divorce on children, legal information, curriculum materials for elementary grades, lists of local community agencies, and a bibliography (35).

CREATING A CONGENIAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Carrying out the recommendations for helping students cope with divorce will also make the school a more congenial place for all students who live with single or stepparents. Important educational efforts and changes are being made throughout the country. According to a survey of elementary principals, many schools have replaced the father-son banquet with a parents' dinner and are careful to schedule conferences and events of interest to parents outside of conventional business hours. Survey respondents also reported that their schools are providing after-school programs and homework assistance for children of working mothers (76).

While the image of the family found in textbooks has become more diverse (37), the curriculum materials used by many school systems still convey the message that the only families that count are those whose children live with both parents (21, 38). Schools need to be sensitive to this message.

Some schools are helping parents with workshops, support groups, and resource information. The National PTA, in cooperation with the National Association of Elementary School Principals and Boys' Town, has published a guide that parent-teacher organizations can use to present a two-part workshop on single parents and their families (47).

Local NEA affiliates participating in Operation Rescue, a nationwide dropout prevention program, provide support for families under stress (45). The association in Corsicana, Texas, for example, has recruited adult volunteers who work with both students and parents. And students involved in the local association's program in Eugene, Oregon, receive tutoring, group counseling, and the help of a student mentor. The Eugene program also has a substantial parental component (46).

Additionally, schools can become more supportive of single-parent homes by providing child care during school events (51) and coping strategies for students. As children take on greater family responsibilities, they need to become competent in child care and emergency procedures (21).

Periodic updating of family information on school registration forms

(18) helps in understanding some of the issues children may be dealing with; it also helps school personnel to respond appropriately. Moreover, the increasing availability of computers in schools simplifies the collection of data in creating student, family, and classroom profiles. This facilitates development of appropriate interventions.

Information about children's divorce-related adjustment can also guide classroom placements. For example, placement of at-risk boys with male teachers may be helpful. In addition, hiring practices at the elementary level might consider outreach to role-model professionals (15).

Available Resources

Children of divorce and other students who live in one-parent or stepparent homes are more likely to have problems in school than their classmates who live with two parents (69). But there are many ways educators can help these students cope with their situations and create a learning environment that is congenial for them. The Annotated Bibliography and the Resource Guide included in this monograph list helpful books for adults and for students, special materials available through organizations and schools, and films/tapes for use with students or by teachers.

The next two chapters provide—

1. background materials that will help teachers understand the psychological dimensions of the divorce process
2. an outline for a workshop suitable for in-service training of school personnel. For workshop leaders, this is important information and we urge that it be sent to participants prior to the presentation.

We also encourage readers to be flexible in their use of any material in this monograph. For example, some might wish to include the background information with the workshop outline rather than separately. Individual needs should determine the most appropriate placement and use of material in all cases.

2. BACKGROUND FOR THE WORKSHOP

INTRODUCTION

Kurdek (40) reflects that one of the most paradoxical characteristics of the children-and-divorce literature is the general absence of a strong developmental perspective. Although he cites Kelly's work as well as that done recently by Compas, Malcarne, and Fondacaro as indicating that coping strategies are age related, most studies attempting to identify predictors of children's divorce adjustment have recruited single samples that vary widely in age without breaking them down into meaningful developmental groups.

The discussion that follows is an effort to bridge the gap. Its focus is upon the effect of divorce upon various developmental stages of the life cycle. Recognizing that there may be common behaviors and needs across childhood and adolescence, this chapter isolates the more specific data into meaningful developmental groups. The assumption is that divorce will affect various family members differently because of the variety of relationships (e.g., mother-son, father-son, mother-daughter, father-daughter) and the particular life-cycle stage of their development. For example, parents who are divorcing when in their fifties usually have less need to direct energy toward career advancement than those who are in their thirties. Therefore, they presumably have more energy to devote to the transitions of the separation.

The following section cites central themes affecting children of divorce, as well as age-related emotional and behavioral reactions.

THE EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON CHILDREN

Like their parents, children too have an inner drive to achieve health and balance. Even though the patterns of adjusting are unique and reflect the individual struggle, there are common stages and emotional reactions. Richard Gardner, a psychiatrist who talks to divorced families, describes these experiences in his book *The Parents' Book About Divorce* (23). The following summary includes illustrative comments by children at each stage.

1. *Denial:* The child unconsciously avoids awareness of any painful event as a means of self-protection until ready to know about it.

   "Divorce is when people go to court and if the children go with you, the judge has to decide where the kids go and the judge talks to you and that's all."

2. *Grief:* The child mourns over the loss of what he or she had hoped would come true.

   "Children are sad and mad cause they love the father just like the mother and even if it wasn't good when we lived together, it could have gotten better."

3. *Sadness and Depression:* The child feels sad and unhappy inside but may not connect this feeling with her or his behavior.

   "Kids are throwing things on the floor and don't pick them up. Then they get yelled at and can't stop crying."

4. *Fear of Abandonment and Separation Anxiety:* Fears of being abandoned and unprotected resurface at the time of divorce causing the child to experience anxiety over separation from parents.

   "The kids don't like to go to school if their parents are going to get a divorce. They know they should go but they worry about what happens at home when they're gone."

5. *Running Away from Home:* Another way to deal with the same fear (#4) is to be the *leaver*, instead of the one who is left. But, as this child points out, the fear of being unprotected does not go away.

   "The children might not like the divorce and run away from home. They run to the sea but then a shark comes."

6. *Immaturity:* The child feels insecure and returns to more dependent behavior hoping to get back the care and secure feelings she or he used to have.

   "I know I don't *need* the night light anymore, but it makes me feel better."

7. *Hypermaturity:* The child feels insecure and compensates for this by being more grown up than is age-appropriate.

   "I put tape on the liquor bottle and then hid it. Now I can tell how much she is drinking."

8. *Guilt:* The child feels responsible for the divorce.

   "The man doesn't want a baby and then they have a baby and he gets big. He gets in the way and the father doesn't want to talk to him and he doesn't play with him. And father fights with Mom and then they get divorced."

9. *Reconciliation Preoccupations:* The child daydreams about how to reunite the family even though outwardly seeming to accept it.

   "After I was hit by the car, my mother and father both came to see me in the hospital and I thought maybe now they'll make up."

10. *Blame:* The child tries to make sense of the situation by determining cause and effect.

    "If the father is doing something bad like hurting their feelings or making a promise and he broke it, the mother doesn't want them to be hurt and then they get a divorce."

11. *Anger:* The child is angry that his or her world has been disrupted and shows it in many different ways.

    "The kids fight with each other because their mother and father are getting mad and aren't doing things together."

12. *Insecurity and Low Self-esteem:* The child is fearful that if one parent left, so too might the other. This makes the child vulnerable to feelings of insecurity and rejection.

    "People get divorced because one of the parents might not like the child."

13. *Money:* The child is confused when told that father loves her or him but does not pay child support.

    "Everyone had money for the uniforms but me."

14. *Visitation:* The child again is confused when told that the parent loves him or her but cannot be counted on for regular visits.

    "He was going to be at the swim meet and again he didn't show."

15. *Parental Criticism of Each Other:* The parents are unable to support each other and the child is caught in the middle.

    "My father always brings me home late and that gets my mother angry."

16. *Using the Children in the Parental Conflict:* The parents may try to use the child as a weapon against each other.

    "My father won't send any more money if I can't visit his parents over Christmas vacation."

17. *Remarriage:* The child takes out anger toward the natural parent on the stepparent or new siblings.

    "My new mother doesn't do anything right."

18. *Acceptance:* The child has come to terms with the divorce and has established a new equilibrium.

    "My parents are still good friends and I understand now that they cared a lot for each other but did not love each other enough to stay married. I'm glad they got divorced because it's better for both of them. They are happier now."

These reactions are natural stages in the post-divorce process. Understanding and acceptance of these feelings help children adjust more smoothly to the new situation. The individual child's capacity to understand, or level of cognitive development, is another influential factor in the adjustment process. The student quotations illustrate various levels of cognitive awareness and social understandings. As children mature, awareness expands.

Younger children are more dependent upon the protective family than older children; because they tend to view the world in concrete and observable terms, their notion of family centers on who lives in their house. Their reasoning is self-centered; consequently they are not yet able to understand the feelings of others. Complex levels of adult relationships are often confusing and quite beyond their reasoning powers. Young children might say "we" are getting a divorce because they see the divorce as something that happens *between* them and their parents. Consequently, they may be more vulnerable to feelings of self-blame because their developmental age does not permit them to see themselves as separate from their mother and father.

In their pioneering work Wallerstein and Kelly (71) have delineated certain categories and issues as they relate to particular developmental cycles of child growth. These will help teachers deal with children in their classrooms who are experiencing their parents' divorce or separation.

Central Themes of the Child's Divorce Experience

- Divorce Is Frightening
- Divorce Is a Time of Sadness and Yearning
- Divorce Is a Time of Worry
- Divorce Is a Time of Feeling Rejected
- Divorce—A Lonely Time
- Divorce Is a Time of Conflicted Loyalties
- Divorce Is a Time of Anger
- The Question of Guilt

Differences in the Children's Responses

One major finding of this project is that the initial response to divorce (and perhaps children's responses to stress in general) is so closely age related and seems to fall so reliably into broad and distinguishable categories that we have been able to mark them off: namely, preschool children (approximately three to five and one-half years old), young school-age children (six- to eight-years-old), older school-age children (nine- to twelve-year-old), and adolescents.

Issues of the Preschool and Kindergarten Children (Three- to Five-year-Olds)

Fear
Regression
Macabre Fantasy
Bewilderment
Replaceability
Fantasy Denial
Play
Rise in Aggression
Inhibition of Aggression
Guilt
Emotional Need
Mastery

Issues of the Young School-Age Children (Six- to Eight-Year-Olds)

Grief
Fear Leading to Disorganization
Feelings of Deprivation
Yearning for the Departed Parent
Inhibition of Aggression at Father
Anger at the Custodial Mother
Fantasies of Responsibility and Reconciliation
Conflicts in Loyalty

Issues of the Older School-Age Children (Nine- to Twelve-Year-Olds)

Attempted Mastery by Activity and Play
Anger
Shaken Sense of Identity
Somatic Symptoms
Alignment with One Parent

Issues of the Adolescents (Thirteen- to Eighteen-Year-Olds)

Changes in Parent-Child Relationships
Worry About Sex and Marriage
Mourning
Anger
Perceptions in Flux
Loyalty Conflicts
Greater Maturity and Moral Growth
More Realistic View of Money
Changed Participation Within the Family
Strategic Withdrawal
Failure to Cope:

- temporary interference with entry into adolescence
- prolonged interference with entry into adolescence
- regression following loss of external values and controls
- pseudoadolescent behavior

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3. THE WORKSHOP OUTLINE

GUIDELINES

This chapter is designed to help teachers become acquainted with some of the issues associated with teaching children of separated and divorced parents. We recommend that a workshop, involving the entire school faculty, be organized and offered to the staff. Teacher and social worker/psychologist/counselor participation in the planning and carrying out of the workshop is crucial. If, for some reason, a schoolwide workshop is not to be offered, individual teachers can benefit from a study of these materials. The process will help prepare teachers to carry on the classroom activities that are suggested. Some of the forms and materials may also be useful, if appropriately modified, with groups of parents, college, and, perhaps, high school students.

Significant changes in traditional marriage and family patterns make it necessary that schools provide in-service training for teachers. Such a training program will—

- develop new understandings and conceptualizations for working with students and parents involved in the divorce/separation process.
- clarify some assumptions concerning the psychological impact of divorce on children.
- increase teacher skill in responding to new situations involving student behaviors and parent-teacher conferences.

Workshop activities could include didactic presentation, discussion, consultation, and feedback from participants. Materials should be provided *before* the workshop so that participants can preview them.

THEMES

The following themes should be reinforced by the presenter:

- Divorce is not simply a legal procedure that dissolves a marriage between two people. It is a process that may cause disruption and distress. It is *also* a time for growth and change as children struggle to achieve a new balance.
- The child's coping strategies vary with age, level of emotional and cognitive development, tolerance for stress, and most important, the amount of nurturing and protection perceived by each child. Studies show that elementary school children appear to make the

necessary adjustments more easily. Children are resilient, striving for health and balance. Educators can help with the quality of that growth.

- Like children, adults (parent/teachers) develop various coping strategies for dealing with issues of divorce and separation. It is important for teachers to be aware of their own strengths and limits—to know what they can and cannot do for children and families of divorce. Issues of divorce and separation cannot be resolved at once. They are part of an ongoing process; the role of teachers in the process is dependent upon the nature of the relationship they have established with the child and family. They need to know when to refer to appropriate support services in the school and how to use consultants, for example.
- For many children of divorce, school represents a "safe" environment. The routine is predictable and the structure offers security—for example, school will always begin at 8:30 and the teacher will ask for a note if the child is late. It is important for teachers to maintain clear expectations at a time when children are confused by the adult world—to allow children to depend on them for consistency and predictability.

DIRECTIONS FOR PRESENTERS

Workshop presenters should strive to create the model of a safe environment, encouraging faculty members to share concerns, seek consultation, and role play difficult situations. Before beginning the workshop, ask the group to write out responses to the following questions and then collect them:

- What do you hope to learn from this workshop?
- Describe a difficult situation you have experienced with students or parents around issues of separation/divorce.
- Does the Survey of Single Parents (pp. 21–24), used as a consciousness-raising device, allow you, the teacher, to put yourself in the role of parent?

WORKSHOP

Consciousness-raising for Teachers: Survey of Single Parents

Objective: To sensitize teachers to the complexity of single parenthood.

Presenter: The following handout is a survey of single parents that was published by the National Committee for Citizens in Education (44). It is a useful way to gather anonymous information from single parents about their views of what the schools should be doing to help them as single parents. The survey could be used with a mixed group of adults, such as that found at a faculty meeting or a PTA meeting, as background for a general discussion of issues relating to educating children from single-parent families. Just the activity of completing the form can sensitize adults to the difficulties of single parenthood.

Directions: Answer the survey as it applies to your school. You will have a little more than five minutes to complete the checklist. Please ignore the sections in which you are asked to "Briefly explain," and save these examples for the sharing period that will follow. Please be as open as possible: you will be able to take this home with you.

Consciousness-raising for Teachers: Family Picture

Objective: To become aware of your family patterns.

Presenter: This exercise can be useful with all ages. It takes very little time; the results serve as a springboard for discussion about what a family comprises, the issues associated with who constitutes the family, the number of family members, where the person who drew the family chooses to locate it, the task family members are engaged in, and the like.

FAMILY PICTURE

Draw a picture of your family as you perceive it today. Use that section of your home where the family is most often together. Please do this without any further directions because what is created is very individual. A simple, rapid drawing will serve the purpose. You will not receive a grade on artistic ability!

A SURVEY OF SINGLE PARENTS*

SCHOOL PROGRAMS AND POLICIES

Directions for this section: Check in each category ("what is" and "what should be") for each item. "What is" refers to the present practice of the school(s) you deal with. "What should be" refers to your opinion about what the school(s) should be doing. If the question does not apply to your situation, please check "N/A" (not applicable).

What Is					What Should Be		
Yes	No	Don't Know	N/A		Yes	No	Don't Know
				1. Are the following parent activities at the school scheduled so that you can be there without taking off work?			
1☐	2☐	3☐	4☐	a. parent-teacher conferences?	1☐	2☐	3☐
1☐	2☐	3☐	4☐	b. programs or parent-teacher organization meetings (e.g., PTA, PTO)?	1☐	2☐	3☐
				2. Are child-care arrangements provided by the school for children?			
1☐	2☐	3☐	4☐	a. during parent-teacher conferences, programs or parent-teacher organization meetings (e.g., PTA, PTO)?	1☐	2☐	3☐
1☐	2☐	3☐	4☐	b. before and after school when you are working?	1☐	2☐	3☐
1☐	2☐	3☐	4☐	3. At evening social events and parent meetings are children welcome to attend?	1☐	2☐	3☐
				4. Does the parent without custody:			
1☐	2☐	3☐	4☐	a. receive information about school activities from the school?	1☐	2☐	3☐
1☐	2☐	3☐	4☐	b. have access to parent-teacher conferences	1☐	2☐	3☐

*From *Single Parents and the Public Schools*, by the National Committee for Citizens in Education, 10840 Little Patuxent Parkway, Columbia, MD 21044. Reprinted with permission. For more information, call 1-800-NETWORK.

1☐	2☐	3☐	4☐	c. receive the child's report cards?	1☐	2☐	3☐
1☐	2☐	3☐	4☐	d. have access to the child's report cards?	1☐	2☐	3☐
1☐	2☐	3☐	4☐	5. Are there spaces on school forms for addresses and phone numbers of both custody and non-custody parents?	1☐	2☐	3☐
1☐	2☐	3☐	4☐	6. Are a variety of family styles (e.g., single father, two-parent family, single mother, adopted children, foster children, non-parent adult living in the home, etc.) included in:			
1☐	2☐	3☐	4☐	a. the textbooks your child uses?	1☐	2☐	3☐
1☐	2☐	3☐	4☐	b. the other school materials your child is exposed to (e.g., workbooks, filmstrips, etc.)?	1☐	2☐	3☐
1☐	2☐	3☐	4☐	c. school library books?	1☐	2☐	3☐
1☐	2☐	3☐	4☐	7. Are there books in the school library that help children deal with death, divorce or loneliness?	1☐	2☐	3☐
1☐	2☐	3☐	4☐	8. Does the school offer any classes or group counseling sessions for children about death, separation or divorce?	1☐	2☐	3☐
1☐	2☐	3☐	4☐	9. Does the school offer any parenting courses specifically for single parents?	1☐	2☐	3☐
1☐	2☐	3☐	4☐	10. If your child rides a school bus, are there late afternoon buses so he/she can take part in after-school activities?	1☐	2☐	3☐
1☐	2☐	3☐	4☐	11. Do you feel any pressure from the school to join the parent organization?	1☐	2☐	3☐
1☐	2☐	3☐	4☐	12. Are you invited to participate in school field trips?	1☐	2☐	3☐

We would like to know more about the programs your child's school has that are responsive to the needs of a single-parent family. Please briefly describe any special classes or counseling sessions for the single-parent child, parenting courses, other programs or policies.

COMMUNICATION

Directions: Please check one for each item.

	Yes	No
(1) Do you feel that you have the kind of influence in your child's educational experience you would like to have?	1☐	2☐
(2) Has contact from the school ever been made when there was no immediate problem with your child?	1☐	2☐
(3) Have you ever had to take time off work to discuss a problem with your child's teacher?	1☐	2☐

ATTITUDES OF SCHOOL PERSONNEL

Directions: Please check one for each item:

(1) In your opinion, what kind of general attitude do the school personnel you know show toward single parents?

Positive 1☐ Negative 2☐ No Opinion 3☐

Please explain briefly:

(2) In what way have you heard public school personnel speak about single parents or children from one-parent homes?

Positive 1☐ Negative 2☐ No Opinion 3☐

Please explain briefly:

	Yes	No	Don't Know
(3) Have you heard school personnel mention "broken homes" or other stereotype language when speaking of single-parent families?	1☐	2☐	3☐
(4) Do you feel school personnel have a protective attitude toward children who have experienced divorce or death of a parent?	1☐	2☐	3☐

(5) To your knowledge, has your child been questioned by school personnel about the care you give him/her? [1]☐ [2]☐ [3]☐

(6) Do you feel the school assumes that any problems your child has (emotional, behavioral, achievement) are related to being from a single-parent family? [1]☐ [2]☐ [3]☐

(7) Do you think school personnel consider the one-parent family to be a normal family cycle? [1]☐ [2]☐ [3]☐

(8) If you and your child have different last names, have school personnel commented about the difference? [1]☐ [2]☐ [3]☐

(9) Does the school assume that both parents are in the home by the following:

a. planning social events for only mother or father to attend with the child (for example, Breakfast with Dad, Mother and Daughter Dinner, etc.)? [1]☐ [2]☐ [3]☐

b. asking children to interview their mother/father for a class assignment? [1]☐ [2]☐ [3]☐

c. asking children to make presents for mother/father at school? [1]☐ [2]☐ [3]☐

d. pressuring children to get both parents to attend a parent meeting (so that, for example, the room will get more points for higher attendance)? [1]☐ [2]☐ [3]☐

The Impact of Separation and Divorce on Children

Objective: To assess the needs of the faculty and their expectations. The topics covered are suggested as guidelines. Cover material that you find to be most beneficial and appropriate.

Presenter: Refer to discussion material.

a. Central Themes of the Child's Divorce Experience
b. Differences in Children's Responses
c. Issues of Preschool and Kindergarten, Young School-Age, and Older School-Age Children (including adolescents).

For a description of children's emotional reactions as described by Richard Gardner in *The Parents' Book About Divorce*, refer to "The Psychological Impact of Separation and Divorce: How Does Divorce Affect the Children?" (23, p. 10).

Highlight the following points:

a. Divorce is a time of loss and of growth and change. It is not always a negative experience as is sometimes assumed. It can be a relief for the child (the fighting stops, a decision can be made, a struggle to achieve a new balance can begin). Teachers need to know where the child is in this process and to respect the individual coping strategies of each young person.

> Temporary regression is an expectable part of the child's developmental process, and unhappiness is a cause for providing comfort, but not for alarm. Developmental interference or depressions that endure beyond the acute phase are quite another matter. These are difficult to distinguish at the time of breakup. (71)

b. An honest recognition of one's own assumptions concerning marriage/divorce, loss/separation is essential in order to better help the child "progress along the developmental ladder." Know when to refer to school support services for consultation.
c. During this period, children of divorce are most sensitive to loss—during holidays and vacations, when losing a book or a pet.

The Impact of Separation and Divorce on Teachers

Objective: To increase teacher skill in responding to emotional reactions of children.

Presenter: What behaviors have you seen or would you expect to see in children involved in the process of separation and divorce? Re-

cord responses on the chalkboard. Then ask: Which behaviors are productive? Which behaviors are not productive?

The intent of this exercise is to lead teachers toward the awareness that all emotional styles and student behaviors are in some way productive, even if all are not productive for the teacher. The behaviors may be signals that the child is working out aspects of the divorce. It is important for teachers to be consistent—to continue to maintain clear classroom expectations and consequences and an acceptance of where the child is in the struggle. Legitimize for teachers the value of a variety of teaching styles. Children are resilient and learn to adapt to a variety of classroom situations and teacher personalities while living with a "school family." *Stress* the importance of the child's not learning manipulation as a coping strategy. Such control of adults is often frightening for children who expect protection and predictability from the adult world. They may find that school is the only dependable and consistent support during this period.

The Impact of Separation and Divorce on Parent-Teacher Conferences

Objective: To sensitize teachers to the additional complexity of a conference with a separated/divorced family.

Presenter: When dealing with divorce and children, you will be faced with your own feelings regarding divorce/marriage and loss/separation (especially if you are also involved or have been involved in a similar process). Pay attention to those feelings so that they do not interfere with your work. Teachers are *not* expected to be counselors or psychologists. (The presenter might choose to role play situations to model appropriate responses or interventions. For instance,

- a boyfriend/girlfriend and custodial parent
- a single mother or father
- both parents and teacher
- a single parent, teacher, counselor, social worker.)

Example of Role Play:

Parent gives teacher extremely personal information (i.e., abusive spouse). Response: "That must be a difficult situation for the whole family. It clearly makes it hard for your child to concentrate on homework, and help seems to be needed. Perhaps there is someone you both can talk to, who can help you deal with this." Suggest a referral.

When making suggestions to parent(s) in parent-teacher conferences, focus your attention on the needs of the child. Before making suggestions, be sensitive to the disruptions and changes that a family experiences during a divorce or separation.

Additional Guidelines for Teachers with a Focus on the Single Parent

Objective: To make teachers and others sensitive to the needs of the single parent and to the children of divorce.

Presenter: Discuss and distribute copies of the handout "Sensitivity Toward Parents."

SENSITIVITY TOWARD PARENTS*

Determine through parent conference the wishes of the custodial and, if appropriate, noncustodial parent. Ascertain how you can help them both maintain a responsible and continuous relationship with their child. Explore ways in which the family, school and child can work together.

Be supportive if a parent expresses concern about the issue of divorce within the family. Encourage parents to set aside a short period of time every day to give each child concentrated attention. This allows the child to feel important and gives the parent an opportunity to understand how the child is really feeling.

Reassure the parent that his or her child is not alone. Forty percent of children born in the 1970s will experience a single-parent home for some period of their lives. . . .

In parent conferences, focus on the present and the future, not the past, the negative or the ex-mate.

Share resources such as relevant books with parents. Encourage them to use the resources of the school, such as the school counselor and/or other support services.

Be aware that financial difficulties may be a major problem for the family. Be cognizant of this when offering camp trips, field trips, school sweatshirts, etc.

Encourage the parent to try to work out a smooth environment for the child, since this is probably the most important factor in determining how well the child adjusts.

Advise parents to encourage their children's friendships with other children. If there are not children in the neighborhood, suggest that they invite school friends over.

Further encourage parents to allow their child to join scouts, ball teams, ballet classes or other such activities. These will give the child other opportunities for positive adult and child relationships.

If the child exhibits extreme distress, encourage the parent to seek professional help. The school counselor may assist in making a referral.

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*Reprinted from "Everything a Child Would Like a Teacher to Know About Divorce," by Ruth Wade and Mary Ivey, Amherst Public Schools (Massachusetts), n.d. Reprinted with permission.

Legal Issues Relating to Separation and Divorce Relevant to the School

Objective: To acquaint teachers with legal issues relevant to children and the school.

Presenter: The following material can be used as the basis of a discussion of legal issues, or it can serve as a handout for participants and then be discussed.

Access to School Records

The federal Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) provides written guidelines. The FERPA regulations state, in essence, that a school district must give both parents access to records unless a court order removes one parent's right to have knowledge about and to participate in a child's education. Custody and residential arrangements do not affect parental access to school records.

Confidentiality of Records

Unless there is legal documentation to the contrary, parents have access to and can copy their child's record. Third-party requests must be accompanied by a written signed release.

The Child's Surname

School administrators can allow students to use whatever name they prefer. When legal evidence is presented that a child's name has been changed, the data should be recorded in his/her folder, a correction made on pertinent school records, and notification made to appropriate school authorities. If there are further questions or unique situations, the school administrator should be contacted.

Medical Emergencies

If a child has a medical emergency, the custodial parent should be contacted first. If the custodial parent is not available, the emergency contact person should be reached. If this is not possible, then the noncustodial parent should be contacted, unless there is documentation in the record that this should not be done.

Release from School and School Visits

Schools should refuse to release a child or to allow visitation to anyone except the custodial parent. Exceptions are made only at the custodial parent's written request.

When written documentation is lacking, the custodial parent should be called and the administrator should abide by the parent's wishes.

Written Notification

It is the staff's responsibility to see that both parents are notified of any school activity in which they might be interested and that both parents receive any report relating to their child or children unless there is a court order to the contrary. Each school should make sure that both parents receive all relevant materials.

Parent Conferences

Unless otherwise restricted, both parents have the right to attend conferences, including those related to PL 94–142 (Education of the Handicapped Act). Either parent may request an evaluation.

Residency

Parents who have separated and/or divorced and moved out of the district should review with school authorities the question of the student's continuing in the present school or changing to a new school.

SUMMARY

The intention of the workshop is to serve as a consciousness-raising experience to sensitize faculty to the many issues related to the separation and divorce process. Although this is a family situation, and should be respected as such, the dissolution of a marriage calls upon the resources of other support systems. A nurturing classroom provides a climate that encourages peers and others to be sensitive and helpful.

This workshop outline has delineated the following categories:

1. Consciousness-raising for Teachers
2. The Impact of Separation and Divorce on Children
3. The Impact of Separation and Divorce on Teachers
4. The Impact of Separation and Divorce on Parent-Teacher Conferences
5. Additional Guidelines for Teachers with a Focus on the Single Parent
6. Legal Issues Relating to Separation and Divorce Relevant to the School

What would you add from your experience?

4. THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER

When the home cannot give the customary emotional and general support in divorce situations, we believe the school can play a significant role in responding to the student's needs. Schools can provide (a) stability within the classroom; (b) kindness and understanding coupled with firm and realistic expectations; and (c) extra support and recognition of learning accomplishments, especially if the student appears to be self-deprecating. Friendly and accepting peer relationships become crucial at this time, and teachers can structure activities and opportunities to create this atmosphere. The child needs to experience school as a stable, non-changing aspect of daily life. If possible, a mental health professional within the school should be available so that the child can share feelings and thoughts. This availability should extend to all members of the separated or reconstituted family.

If a climate of trust exists in a school, parents are more likely to inform their child's teacher about an impending separation or divorce. How sensitively teachers and the school community handle this information can be critical in enabling students and their families to manage this time of family upheaval. Respecting confidentiality, not giving unsolicited advice, and reassuring parents they are not alone are helpful guidelines for school personnel to observe (18). When a nurturing relationship exists between teacher and student, help in coping with home problems very often takes place (1, 72). For some teachers who have a special sensitivity in working with children of divorced parents, the teacher checklist devised by Drake (20) may be useful.

Research indicates that teachers with personal experience of divorce are more likely to encourage involvement by the school (28). Psychiatrists have confirmed the value of placing a child involved in divorce with a teacher who has been through the process (18). In the videotape, *When Divorce Comes to School* (36), one of the authors (Warschauer) commented that—

> I've made it a point to let the children know that I'm divorced. I think it's important for them to know that not only their parents are going through this, but other people have gone through it. They've survived, they're happy, they're functioning, and that it's o.k. It's another way of living in this world.

If a teacher has coped well, the child sees a positive role model and the stigma of the experience has lessened. If the child has a close relationship with the teacher, resentment toward the parents may be de-

creased. Placing a child in a classroom where other children are going through the experience may also be helpful.

Teachers who share what is happening in their families and what is important to them encourage children to do the same. Mature, experienced teachers who are comfortable with affective education will incorporate this approach as part of their teaching style. Unfortunately, schools of education devote very little time in their teacher-training programs to helping students acquire these skills (56). Teacher characteristics are a potentially important factor in mediating students' adjustment to divorce.

In addition to the teacher, other sources of support for children include friends, siblings, classmates, grandparents, cousins, neighbors, and parents of good friends (9, 71). Researchers suggest that children's help-seeking is a generalized trait in that children who turned to parents for assistance were also likely to turn to friends and teachers. Children who seek help are likely to tap a variety of resources, whereas those who do not seek help are apt to be psychologically stranded. Although these findings need to be replicated and supplemented by future research (particularly regarding the role of siblings), they nevertheless provide a rationale for the design of child-oriented community or school-based intervention programs that might offset the short- and long-term effects of stressful family relations (13, 34). Children whose parents are divorced often find that other children in similar situations are helpful in dealing with divorce-related concerns (40). Group intervention techniques can capitalize on these findings.

The classroom teacher is the person in the school who deals most directly with children in a divorce situation because contact is daily and for many hours within the day.

Not all children whose families are going through divorce come to school with insurmountable problems, just as not all children who are going through any emotional upset at home necessarily have difficulties at school. Some children are able to adjust well. They experience pain, but also a feeling of acceptance and a willingness to deal with problems as they come up. Children who do reflect difficulties appear to fall into two broad categories: those who are withdrawn and those who act out:

Examples of the Withdrawn Student

- The child who has difficulty responding to other children or engaging in and meeting academic expectations
- The student who tends to be shy, timid, and retreating
- Conversely, the child who clings and demands a great deal of teacher attention.

Examples of the Acting-Out Student

- The child who tends to show her or his feelings by being disruptive and equally demanding of teacher time, but in an attention-getting way
- The child who shows distinct differences in behavior at school vs. the home situation. For example: the child is insolent and uncooperative at school, but overzealous at home (or the reverse).

Some children may exhibit a sudden drop in academic work or the opposite—a real concentration on doing the best work possible. At this time it is very important for the classroom to be a stable place for the child. By being open in conversation about what is happening in their own families, teachers can help children accept similar changes at home.

The most helpful thing a teacher can do is to encourage the parent to inform the school when a divorce or any other major change is occurring. Letting teachers know what is happening can help sensitize school personnel to the home situation and be supportive. Teachers and administrqtors need to encourage this openness with parents in their day-to-day contact.

The teacher's sensitivity toward the child's situation has to be carefully balanced, however. For example, making too many exceptions for children who are going through difficult times can undermine their sense of strength and competency. Children's feelings should be respected, but they should be expected to carry out their academic and classroom responsibilities as much as possible.

Often schools provide groups in which children can express their feelings. Besides groups led by mental-health professionals, there are many classroom activities that teachers can plan for all children, not only for those going through trauma. One of the authors (Warschauer) has a classroom-based activity sequence of four or more meetings.

FOUR GROUP MEETINGS FOR ELEMENTARY CLASSROOMS

Each class meeting is intended to develop a group atmosphere that sensitizes students to listening to others expressing feelings and moves into the variety of family configurations represented in the class. The rationale is to provide a base of trust among the students and their teacher around issues of separation and divorce. The purpose in proposing four class meetings is to provide a sequential process from generalized expression and recognition of feelings to the specific issues of divorce and separation. For the process to be effective, it is important that a comfortable nonjudgmental climate be established.

1st Group Meeting
(30 minutes)

Feelings

Help the group establish group rules that enhance listening skills (that is, guaranteeing each child time to finish a statement without interruption, comment, or ridicule).

Suggested Activity

Ask each student to write a "feeling" on a piece of paper—for example, "anger," "shyness," "fear." Then list all the responses on the board and note the range of feelings. Encourage students to give an example of a situation or time (anger—when only one of my parents came to the school play).

A discussion that centers on appropriate ways to deal with these feelings should follow.

2d Group Meeting
(30 minutes)

Relationships with Siblings

Review group rules established during the first meeting. Ask students to complete the following five questions (grades K–2 may need to have oral responses in a circle format).

1. My place in the family is the _____ child. (youngest, oldest, etc.)
2. I would like my place in the family to be _____.
3. The best part about being where I am in the family is _____
   _____
4. The worst part about being where I am in the family is _____
   _____
5. I wish _____.

After they complete the five statements, encourage students to share their responses and discuss them in the meeting.

3d Group Meeting
(40 minutes)

Relationships in Families

Ask children to draw a picture of their families. The picture should show where the family gathers most often.

Discussion

Children share pictures, describing who is in the picture and what the family is doing. The teacher can stress the variety of lifestyles represented in the pictures (i.e., single parent, extended family, stepparents, grandaunts/uncles, families with other adults sharing the household, foster families).

4th Group Meeting
(Untimed—may require two or three sessions to complete reading)

Divorce and Separation—Reading to the Class

This meeting could deal with the issue of divorce and separation directly. The suggested activity is to read a story about divorce and separation to the class as a whole to stimulate class discussion. For suggested books appropriate to grade level, see the Resource Guide (pp. 45–48).

After the books have been read, a class discussion can be easily initiated by the teacher dealing directly with issues regarding separation and divorce. Some teachers feel more comfortable having a counselor, social worker, or school psychologist present for these discussions.

CURRICULUM AREAS

In addition to four class meetings, other important curriculum areas can deal directly with divorce and separation issues.

Creative writing can help children express feelings and release tensions. It must be broad enough so that all children can write about issues that have emotional meaning for them, yet *specific* enough for children involved in the divorce process to feel supported in expressing their feelings. Possible topics might include "Things I'd Like to Tell My Family," "Dear Abby," "Happiness Is . . . Sadness Is," "Once Upon a Time, There Was a Loving Stepmother."

Poetry by its very nature sensitizes children and helps them express thoughts and emotions that they might otherwise not express. This can occur both through reading and writing.

Art activities can help some children, reluctant to express feelings verbally, feel less inhibited. Animals and other imaginative characters are also ways of expressing feelings more easily.

Dramatics can be a full-fledged play, a reenactment of an event, role playing, or pantomime. Stimulus material to be used as a basis for dramatization may be an actual problem conveyed by a child or teacher or a stimulus from an external source, such as an incomplete story with alternative endings, a short story, a poem or a story written by the teacher for a specific purpose. The emphasis should be on feelings and relationships, but not on family issues of a personal nature.

Pantomime might be used for the purpose of increasing awareness and accurate perception of body language and other nonverbal communication. Begin with very simple situations that are familiar, with action that is clear-cut. The sequence might progress from pantomime to role playing. In selecting the actors, the teacher will want to ask children to play roles that will help them gain personal insight or empathy for others. Children may benefit from playing a role with which they identify. A teasing child might once be asked to play the role of the teaser and another time that of the victim. It is imperative that all actors be willing to participate; a role should never be forced on a child.

Literature—Exploitation of the emotions, needs, interpersonal relationships, and social problems of literary characters is much safer psychologically for children than is exploration of their own personal struggles. Through sensitive discussions about the feelings of characters in a story, followed by hearing the feelings of individuals identifying with the characters because of similar experiences, children are better prepared for free and articulate communication during class meetings for social problem solving.

Possible questions to use when discussing books might include—

- Which character do you understand best?
- How do you think the character felt about the situation(s) in the story?
- Are there characters in the story to whom you could feel close?
- Are there characters in the story who made you feel sad or angry?
- Would you have changed the story in any way?

Although not formally part of the curriculum, divorce is often a very real element within the contemporary classroom. The elementary school teacher, through an acceptance of this idea and activities such as those just discussed, can provide a healthier, less stressful environment to those children directly involved as well as to others in the class who cannot help being affected.

GROUP ACTIVITIES AT THE SECONDARY LEVEL

Wallerstein's latest study shows that adolescence is a period of particularly grave risk for children in divorced families (68). Therefore, at the secondary level, it is important to be aware of this vulnerability, to sensitize faculty and provide programs.

In spite of the more diffuse relationships that teenagers have with each teacher, Francke reports that—

> Time and time again, they cite a specific teacher, counselor, or athletic coach who helped them through the stress of divorce and served as a role model when all their familial role models seemed to be crumbling around them. (21)

Although we have focused on the elementary school level, there is a framework to support children of separation and divorce that is compatible with the secondary school. First, there is a structured peer support group. In the Newton, Massachusetts, Public Schools, a junior high school elective, "Children's Issues in Separation and Divorce," met four times per week. It provided students with academic credit and valuable insights. As one student commented:

> If I didn't take this group, I'd still be thinking my parents' divorce was the worst thing that could ever happen to me, but I found out that it happens to a lot of kids, happened to a lot of people and some of them are worse off than what happened to mine.

A high school group called "The Family" was not intended specifically for children of divorce. It was for any teenager interested in exploring important issues rarely addressed in most high school classrooms. Courses in counseling skills, human relations, career planning, human sexuality, were all designed to help students understand themselves, their relationships with others, and their own value structure.

> Being in the group was fantastic. It was absolutely the best way I could communicate whatever feelings I had about the way my parents were behaving.

A second forum to help high school students cope with the issues of a separated, single, or blended family structure is to form a counseling group. Each session deals with issues relevant to the students. The group's leader should always be a skilled mental health professional. The goal is for students to share their feelings in a supportive and confidential setting so that they can return to the classroom better able to attend to academic work.

CONCLUSION

We hope that the preceding information will be helpful to classroom teachers and the school systems in which they work. Since these systems are controlled at the local level, any programs relating to the impact of divorce on school-age children will be uneven in implementation. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts has made an effort to address this issue by establishing a Special Commission Relative to Divorce. Its interim report (63) focused on the legal aspects and the training of court personnel, but it also looked at the schools. One of the results was legislation filed in 1987 and 1988 (House Bill 2500) that would establish an Office for Family Education. This would provide training and education to school personnel regarding the psychological and legal aspects of divorce and its effect on the school-age child. It is a useful model for other states to examine, looking toward the day when funding will become available.

It is our strong belief that the school as an institution (e.g., teachers, administrators, mental-health professionals, and auxiliary personnel) can have a short- and long-term effect upon the lives of children and parents. At the very least, the stabilizing effect of the school and an understanding teacher can enable children to find and utilize their inner resources to cope with the loss they experience when their parents are no longer together.

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FILMS AND VIDEOTAPES

The following films may be ordered from the American Association for Counseling and Development (Order Services, 5999 Stevenson Avenue, Alexandria, VA 22304 [1-800-545-ASCD]):

Children of Divorce: Transitional Issues for Elementary School Age. This 12-minute, stimulus vignette film is intended for use directly with children in group situations and for courses and training in counseling elementary students. It is designed to be stopped after each vignette.

Children of Divorce: Transitional Issues for Junior High and High School Ages. This 12-minute, stimulus vignette film is intended for use directly with adolescents in group situations and for courses and training in counseling of junior high and high school-age children. It is designed to be stopped for discussion after each vignette.

The following videotape may be ordered from Dr. Merry Hanson, MCH Productions (529 W. Third Avenue, Suite 500, Portland, OR 97204 [503–248–5039]):

Children at Risk: When A Family Comes Apart. This 30-minute, half-inch videotape includes a complimentary text and has been used frequently in staff development workshops.

The following videotape may be ordered from Film Ideas (3080 Scotch Lane, Riverwood, IL 60015):

When Divorce Comes to School. This 15-minute video portrays a range of feelings expressed by elementary and secondary students concerning their personal experience with divorce. The children were taped during group meetings at their schools.

RESOURCE GUIDE

BOOKS FOR STUDENTS

Bienenfeld, Florence. *My Mom and Dad are Getting a Divorce*. St. Paul: EMC Corporation, 1980. Ages 4–12. Tells "how it is" for two fictional characters, Amy and Dan; at the same time the book describes the feelings of millions of real children who experience divorce.

Blume, Judy. *It's Not the End of the World*. New York: Dell, 1986. Grades 4–7. Karen and her sister cope with their feelings after divorce in a way that would seem quite real to suburban children.

Brown, Laurene Krasny, and Brown, Marc. *Dinosaurs Divorce: A Guide to Changing Families*. Boston and New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1986.

Byars, Betsy. *The Night Swimmers*. New York: Dell, 1986. Grades 5–8. An enterprising girl tries to be a housekeeper for her father and take care of her two brothers. She realizes this is not her role when her father remarries.

Cleary, Beverly. *Dear Mr. Henshaw*. New York: Morrow, 1983. Ages 8–10. Newberry Award winner. In his letter to his favorite author, 10-year-old Leigh reveals his problems in coping with his parents' divorce, being the new boy in school, and generally finding his way in the world.

Cleaver, Vera, and Cleaver, Bill. *Lady Ellen Grae*. New York: New American Library, 1978. Grades 5–8. A girl in Appalachia survives the aftermath of her parents' divorce even though she does not live with either of them.

Corcoran, Barbara. *Hey, That's My Soul You're Stepping On*. New York: Atheneum, 1978. Grades 5–9. While her parents confront their marital problems, Rachel is sent to her grandparents, who live in a residential motel with other re-

tired couples. A new friendship helps her to gain perspective on her family responsibilities and loyalties and to come to terms with her parents' divorce.

Danziger, Paula. *The Divorce Express*. New York: Delacorte, 1982. Ages 10–14. The story of a ninth-grade girl who lives in upstate New York during the week and travels on the "Divorce Express" bus to visit her father on weekends. The girl, whose name is Phoebe, initially expresses her confusion and distress by acting out in school, but comes to some sense of calm and acceptance.

Dolmetsch, Paul, and Shih, Alexa. *The Kids' Book About Single-Parent Families (By Kids for Everyone)*. Garden City, New York: Dolphin, 1985. Grade 7 and up. A look at the single-parent family experience through the eyes of adolescents.

Fisher, Lois I. *Rachel Vellars, How Could You?* New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1985. Ages 9–12. This story of a friendship between two sixth-grade girls who live with their divorced fathers presents a picture of two very different divorced families.

Gardner, Richard. *The Boys' and Girls' Book About Divorce*. New York: Bantam, 1971. Grade 4 and up. A straightforward discussion of issues of concern to children whose parents have divorced. The author, a child psychiatrist, offers children practical suggestions about handling themselves and making the best of their situations. Illustrations enhance the text. Considered by many to be a classic for children and adults.

Gerber, Merrill Joan. *Please Don't Kiss Me Now*. New York: New American Library, 1982. Grade 9 and up. When her father remarries and her mother starts to date, 15-year-old Leslie feels abandoned and seeks security in a teenage romance. A tragic accident and a faltering romance cause Leslie to reevaluate her mother's genuine concern.

Gerson, Corine. *Son for a Day*. New York: Scholastic, 1983. Grades 5–9. Funny, poignant novel of a street-savvy boy who creates adventure and perks up his family life in the process.

Gilbert, Sara. *By Yourself*. New York: Lothrop, Lee and Shephard, 1983. Grades 4–9. Illustrated guide for the youngster at home alone. Covers feelings, safety, simple snacks, and helping out around the house.

_____. *How To Live with a Single Parent*. New York: Lothrop, Lee and Shephard, 1982. Grade 7 and up. The author draws upon her own experiences as well as those of single-parent teens from all backgrounds and from experts on teens and parents.

Harris, Mark Jonathan. *With a Wave of the Wand*. New York: Scholastic, 1982. Grades 5–8. Marlee, with the help of her brother, tries to reunite her parents. She finds another solution, however, and realizes that divorce has not diminished her parents' love for her.

Holland, Isabelle. *The Man Without a Face*. New York: Harper and Row Junior Books, 1987. Grade 6 and up. A somewhat controversial story about a much-divorced mother and her family. Her son, Charlie, has quite a time adjusting but is helped by his friendship with an older man.

Hunter, Evan. *Me and Mr. Stenner*. New York: Dell, 1986. Grades 5–9. The story of Abby, who lives in an upper-middle-class home with her mother and Mr. Stenner, her stepfather. The book has a lot of humor and focuses on the girl's relationship with her stepfather.

Kelin, Norma. *It's Not What You Expect*. New York: Avon, 1982. Grade 6 and up. A "liberated" family weathers Dad's three-month "absence."

_____. *Mom, The Wolfman and Me*. New York: Avon, 1977. Ages 11–14. The story of a girl who has lived with only her mother for all of her 11 years and the adjustment the girl has to make when her mother decides to marry for the first time.

_____. *Taking Sides*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1974. Ages 11–14. The story of Nell and Hugo, who spend most of the week with their father in New York City and weekends with their mother and her friend Greta in the country.

LeShan, Eda. *What's Going To Happen to Me?* New York: Macmillan, 1986. Grades 3–7. Answers many questions children have about divorce, discusses feelings, and suggests ways of coping.

List, Julie Autumn. *The Day the Loving Stopped*. New York: Fawcett, 1981. Grade 8 and up. Julie recounts her reactions to her parents' divorce from initial shock to acquiescence. Although she misses her father, visitation works and the bonds with her mother and sister are strengthened.

Long, Lynette. *On My Own: The Kids' Self-Care Book*. New York: Acropolis Books, 1984. Grade 4 and up. Twelve illustrated chapters cover what children need to know if they have responsibility for themselves while their parents work.

Mann, Peggy. *My Dad Lives in a Downtown Hotel*. New York: Avon, 1985. Grades 3–6. After a struggle, Joey realizes his father's leaving is not his fault, and Joey learns how to cope with life as it is.

Mazer, Norma. *I, Trissy*. New York: Dell, 1986. Grades 4–9. Trissy uses her typewriter to vent her frustrations about her parents' divorce and problems brought on by her selfishness and unwillingness to understand her parents. Finally, she begins to question her own identity and becomes better able to face these troubles.

Mendonca, Susan. *Tough Choices*. New York: Scholastic, 1983. Grade 7 and up. Crystal must choose a parent with whom to live and makes the wrong choice for the wrong reasons. She lives first with her mother and then with her father and his new family until she rebels at the rules and responsibilities. As a runaway, she is confronted with a new understanding of family life.

Park, Barbara. *Don't Make Me Smile*. New York: Avon, 1984. Grades 4–7. Charlie, the 11-year-old hero, tells the story of his parents' divorce and his efforts to reunite them. After disastrous results, he concedes that the divorce is final and he must adjust.

Perl, Lila. *The Telltale Summer of Tina C*. New York: Archway, 1984. Grades 5–9. Trying to untangle the confusing relationship of divorce and remarriage, Tina begins to understand her loved ones. Positive, open relationships with both parents are portrayed.

Perry, Patricia, and Lynch, Marietta. *Mommy and Daddy Are Divorced*. New York: Dial Books, 1985. Ages 3–7. This is the story of two young brothers who visit with their father every Saturday following their parents' divorce. Photographs enhance the story of the mix of feelings as they visit and then miss him during the rest of the week.

Pevsner, Stella. *A Smart Kid Like You*. New York: Scholastic, 1976. Grade 7 and up. A realistic view of some after-effects of divorce. Nina finds her new math teacher is her father's new wife. This story became an ABC After School Special.

Richards, Arlene, and Willis, Irene. *How To Get It Together When Your Parents Are Coming Apart*. Summit, N.J.: Willard Press. Grade 8 and up. A self-help book for adolescents, with examples of what young adults and teens may need to cope with during and after their parents' marital troubles, separation, and divorce. The emphasis is on awareness of feelings, coping skills, and reassurance that young people are able to take responsibility for their own lives.

Slote, Alfred. *Matt Gargan's Boy*. New York: J.P. Lippincott, 1975. Ages 9–13. The hero of this baseball story is an 11-year-old boy whose parents are divorced and whose father is a major league baseball player. Although the boy's relationship with his dad is essentially a long distance one, he fantasizes about his father's return to the marriage while trying to discourage his mother's relationships with other men.

Snyder, Zilpha Keatley. *Headless Cupid*. New York: Dell, 1985. Grades 5–8. Fun and intrigue result when stepbrothers and sisters begin adjusting to each other and to their new parents.

Stenson, Janet Sinberg. *Now I Have a Stepparent and It's Kind of Confusing*. New York: Avon, 1979. Ages 6–11. Discusses the variety of feelings children have when parents remarry.

Wright, Betty Ren. *Getting Rid of Marjorie*. New York: Scholastic, 1984. Ages 8–12. The story of a 10-year-old girl who is very close to her widowed grandfather and becomes very upset and angry when he remarries.

Susan R. Berger

Rohna A. Shoul

Susan Warschauer